

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN TENDENCY  
IN ORATORIO.

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## INTRODUCTORY.

The modern definition of an oratorio is that it is a musical setting, in a dramatic style, of a poem or prose text of a religious nature, to be performed by chorus, solo voices and orchestra, without action, costume or scenery.

"The absence of scenic accessories, and of all such things as are conveyed to the mind and feelings through the eyes, has drawn the form in the same direction as abstract instrumental music; for people are more critical about details when their attention is concentrated on the music than when it is distracted by other elements of effect. So that oratorio has been found to require more definite and clear forms and more distinct articulation in minutiae than opera. In opera slovenly workmanship has generally been preferred by the public to artistic finish which bores and distracts them from the play. In oratorio slovenly workmanship or faulty designing cannot long pass without being resented. And moreover, the conditions are more favorable for careful and scrupulous artistic work. The absence of action reduces the stringency of the need to keep the music continuously going. In opera the action is impeded and weakened by breaking the music into disconnected pieces, however finished and beautiful they may be in detail; but in oratorio it is a distinct advantage to have breaks that rest the mind and even to emphasize points in the movements themselves by occasional and discreet

repetition. So that it is not only necessary to make design clear and artistic workmanship thorough, but the situation actually gains by the use of set forms which render such treatment possible..... In opera the attention is centered upon the individual singers and their stage fortunes; and the chorus, who cannot learn anything at all complicated by heart, are little better than lay figures. But in oratorio the prominence of the soloists is immensely toned down, and is more on a level with the other elements of effect; and the form of art is in no respect more strongly distinguished from all other branches of music than by the inevitable prominence of that democratic element, the chorus." \*

H. R. Haweis defines oratorio as follows: "It is not only serious or sad, but it is a curious compromise between religion and art. It occupies, in fact, the dubious border-land between the church and the stage; it is devout contemplation, but not exactly prayer; it is dramatic without being spectacular; musical but not profane; almost congregational, yet not altogether religious, though it undoubtedly supplies a want." \*\*

The purpose of the present discussion is not to present a detailed history of oratorio --- that may be found in any good dictionary --- but to characterize oratorio in its different stages of development, to compare the ancient with the classical and modern forms, and

\* Parry, "The Evolution of the Art of Music."

\*\* H. R. Haweis, "Oratorio and Drama," Harpers, v.80.

to show in a concrete way how the works of one period differ from those of another. This characterization will be made not only in a general way, but also in a more or less detailed analysis of the technical handling of musical material in several works representing the different stages of development of the form of oratorio. Everything in music is based upon what has gone before, or influenced by it, and for this reason it will be necessary to discuss briefly the beginnings and early history of oratorio.

#### EARLY INFLUENCES.

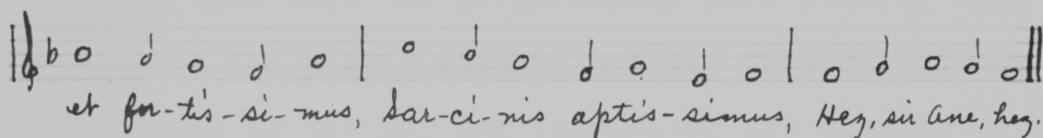
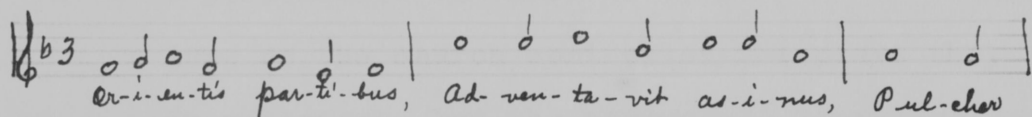
As a distinct musical form the oratorio had its beginning in the year 1600, but this beginning was only the result, or the culmination of practices of preceding centuries, the influence of the revival of learning known as the renaissance, and several years of experiment by a group of scholars in Italy during the last half of the sixteenth century. The earliest influences that can be definitely found are the mystery, miracle and morality plays of the middle ages.

There is doubt as to whether these plays owed their origin to the continuation of the ancient Greek drama through the early centuries of the Christian era or to the Roman church. Authorities agree that the Romans copied the Greek drama, and that it became so degraded and disgustingly immoral at Rome that it was finally prohibited through the growing power of the church. But some are of

the opinion that Greek drama was continued in the east and came to the western part of the continent by way of Constantinople, while others think it was lost completely and that the plays of the middle ages were new forms instituted by the church.

During the middle ages, owing to the dense ignorance and superstition of the people, it was difficult to impress upon them the teachings of the church. The church discovered that the average person will be more impressed by an action seen than by an action heard of. As a result, bits of drama began to appear in the services of the church to illustrate some biblical story, or the consequences of sin. This began about the year 900. The meager information available indicates that at first the scenes were sung in Latin as a part of the service, but that they became so popular that it was necessary to translate them into the vernacular, to separate them from the service proper and to perform them outside on the porch of the church or in the churchyard where there was more room for the crowds. The first scene of which there is any mention is one representing the visit of the three Marys to the tomb of Christ on Easter morning, a scene which has remained a favorite for musical settings to the present time. Perhaps the oldest representation of which there is any certain record is the "Festival of the Ass," which was celebrated at Beauvais and Sens in the twelfth century. During the celebration (in commemoration of the flight of Joseph and Mary and the Christ child into Egypt)

a richly caparisoned ass, bearing on its back a maiden with a young child in her arms, was led through the city to the cathedral and up to the altar while the crowd sang the following carol:



These representations were popular throughout western Europe for more than four centuries. From the beginning they were fostered by the clergy for the purpose of giving religious instruction, but also from the beginning they tended to pass over into secular means of entertainment. Three types of play developed, the Mystery play, the Miracle play and the Morality play.

The Mystery play was the representation of some biblical story, the stories of the Easter season being most generally used. Other titles (translated) found are: "The Conversion of St. Paul," sung at Rome in 1440; "Abraham and his Son Isaac," (1449); "Abel and Cain" (1554); "Samson" (1554); "Abraham and Sarah" (1556); "The Prodigal Son" (1565).

The Miracle play was similar to the Mystery play with the exception that instead of taking for its subjects

scenes from the bible, it took instead its materials from the legends of the saints, representing the miracles they performed, the heroic deeds done or sacrifices made in the cause of their religion.

The Morality play was an allegory in which virtues and evils were personified and made to act.

So long as the church controlled the plays they remained purely religious, but the attendance became so great after a time that the performances were removed from the churches to the public squares and the fields, and the parts were taken by the lay men instead of the clergy. Secular elements gradually crept in and buffoonery and absurdities were introduced for entertainment rather than for instruction. The trades gilds frequently organized themselves into companies, each gild choosing an appropriate play --- the drapers playing the Creation, the water-drawers the Deluge, and so on. Troupes frequently traveled in groups, each troupe giving one play in a cycle. Stages on wheels were used for travel and for performance. When one play was completed, the curtain was drawn and the wagon was moved to the next stopping place, its place being taken by another wagon on which was presented the next play of the cycle. The scenery was hard to change, and to save time the stage was often divided into two or three sections, ready set, the actors passing from one section to another when a change of scene was desired. Heaven, earth and hell were represented in three decks, heaven on top, earth in the middle and hell below. The costumes were gaudy and often

inappropriate. God wore a white coat and had a gilded face, and Satan always had a tail.

These plays are important in the study of oratorio because the use of music in them was common. The old manuscripts contain stage directions indicating passages to be sung and suggestions for the manner of singing. Comments on the progress of the action were sometimes sung by a chorus, and between scenes instruments were frequently played. Sometimes it was necessary to employ a narrator to supply parts of the story which could not be represented, and it was quite common for this narrator to sing his lines.

These plays gradually developed into types, until by the beginning of the sixteenth century the drama was firmly established, and although somewhat crude as yet, was well on its way toward the modern theatre. By the middle of the century it was seen that music could be used with good effect throughout the play, and here was made a differentiation between the spoken drama and the sung drama, the latter of which became known later as opera. Up to this time there had been only one drama, and music was a part of it. From about 1565 the music drama began to take a new path, and by 1600 was established as a new form. It was, in fact, established as two new forms in one, differing only in the nature of the text --- the opera, or secular music drama, and the oratorio, or sacred music drama,--- for in the year 1600 there appeared within a few months of each other what is considered the first real oratorio and the first real opera. However, while it is well to make a differen-

tiation between these two forms, they were the same except for the nature of the subject treated. And today, the only real difference between opera and the latest development of oratorio is that the one is a secular musical drama, presented with full dramatic effect, while the other is a sacred musical drama, presented without action, costumes or scenery.

Two direct influences brought about the appearance of the first work known as an oratorio: (1) the activities of an Italian priest by the name of Filippo Neri, and (2) the efforts of a small group of scholars and musicians at the home of a certain Count Bardi in Florence.

Filippo Neri was a Florentine who was admitted to the Roman priesthood in 1561 and who became active in philanthropic and educational work, first at the Saint Girolamo monastery and later at the church of Sta. Maria in Vallicella. Here in 1564 he formed a brotherhood for popular instruction, called the Congregation of the Oratory. Meetings for the instruction of the humbler youth of the city were held in the oratory, or small chapel of the church. Although the mystery and miracle plays had by this time fallen into disrepute and out of favor of the church, Neri recognized their value as a means of instruction and adopted their principle in these popular meetings. He introduced the singing of *Laudi Spirituali*, which were collections of hymns prepared for another brotherhood, but used here as congregational hymns. He also began the performance of sacred plays which were versions



of scenes from biblical history. These were presented with costume and action in a way similar to that of the plays of the middle ages. They were usually sung by a four-part chorus and solo voices. Each play was divided into two parts, the first of which was presented before the sermon, and the second after it. Neri found this a good means to having an interested congregation. His sermon consisted of a discussion of the subject matter of the play. He called to his assistance Animuccia and Palestrina of the Papal Chapel who wrote many new hymns for the congregation and set a number of plays to music. Since the plays were presented in the small chapel, or oratory of the church, the term "oratorio" came to be applied to them and came to designate a sacred drama set to music.. However, up to the time of Neri's death in 1595 the oratorio had not emerged as a distinct form.

While Neri was enriching his services by the use of sacred drama and music, another movement was under way, the result of which, influenced by these practices of Neri, was to produce the new form known as oratorio.

In 1575 the wealthy Count of Vernio, Giovanni Bardi, a poet and amateur musician, drew around him a group of scholars and musicians, who, under the influence of the new interest in Greek art, were endeavoring to restore Greek drama in its entirety. The great difficulty which presented itself was to determine the form of musical declamation used by the Greeks. But this declamation was a lost art for the Greeks had no exact system of notation.

The problem then resolved itself into the invention of a musical form which would lend itself to dramatic expression. The prevailing polyphonic style was impossible because with it there could be no individual expression. With it, each voice, while having a melody of its own, was only a part of a whole --- in other words, the result was a mass effort which could not express the varying shades of individual emotion which is necessary in the drama. Names in this Florentine group which have become famous for work toward this end are those of Vincenzo Galilei (d.1600), Emilio del Cavalieri (d.1602) who later wrote the first distinct oratorio, Jacopo Peri (d.1633) and Giulio Caccini (d.1618), the latter two being amateur musicians who together in 1594 made a setting of the poem "Dafne," written by Ottavio Rinuccini (d.1621), another of the group.

The experiments of these scholars and musicians were extended over a period of some twenty-five years and resulted in the production of a new style of singing known as monodic in contrast to polyphonic, a sort of accompanied recitative for solo voice. At first the accompaniment was by a single instrument of the lute family, but soon more instruments were added in performances. Another point of progress was the discovery of the tendency of the leading tone and the consequent development of the modern scales and discarding of the old modes. In a few years, polyphonic music, which was the only style written and recognized as music by the teachers of the time, was supplanted, except in the church liturgy, by this new

recitative style in new modes, and with its instrumental accompaniment, usually of just a figured bass.

It is not to be supposed that music for a solo voice was an innovation at this time, for it had been generally used in the plays of the middle ages; but up to this time it had never been recognized by musicians as legitimate music and had not been taught in the schools. But a real innovation in the new style was the appearance in the accompaniments of many unprepared discords.

W. S. Rockstro, in his article on monodia in Grove's Dictionary, has this to say regarding these dissonances:

"The use of these discords inevitably led to the repudiation of the ancient ecclesiastical modes in favor of the modern major and minor scales, and these scales once established, the new system was complete. No doubt unisonous vocal music with little or no accompaniment had been heard in the Canzonetta, Villanella, and other forms of national melody, ages and ages before the birth of Galilei; and that the recognition of what we now call the 'Leading Note' as an essential element of melody was no new thing, may be gathered from the words of Zarlino, who, writing in 1558, says 'even Nature herself has provided for these things; for not only those skilled in music, but also the Contadini who sing without any art at all, proceed by the interval of a semitone' --- i.e., in forming their closes."

In 1602 Caccini published at Venezia an explanation and defense of the new monodic style, entitled "Nuove Musiche." The following example, taken from this work,

shows the use of an unprepared dominant seventh in the last cadence over the figure 14. The use of the seventh by the writers in the new style was common at this time.

Di-ta-li vo-i se di me vi ca-le chil mio gran male vita da gl'occhi suo-i

Handwritten musical score for the song "Ditte-le che ri-mi-ri". The score is written on two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The melody is in G major, indicated by one sharp (F#). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first line of the melody is "Ditte-le che ri-mi-ri" and the second line is "Ditte-le che ri-mi-ri Mentre ch'io". The music is written in a simple, handwritten style.

Handwritten musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is written in a single system with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are written below the staves.

Lyrics: *mo-ro al-me-ne mie-i mar-ti-ri.*

Handwritten musical notation includes notes, rests, and a double bar line. The bottom staff has a sharp sign (#) under the first note and a double bar line with a sharp sign (#) and the number 14 below it.

Another development along with the monodic style was the well rounded and balanced form of the cantata or drama. Contained in this large form which may now be called opera or oratorio were separate musical numbers, each of a particular symmetrical form.

Thus it is seen that the activities of the priest Neri, and the efforts of the Florentine group, in a little over twenty-five years preceding the opening of the seventeenth century, accustomed the people again to the presentation of

sacred drama in the church, produced a dramatic style of individual, or solo, singing, and developed a symmetrical form of the drama as a whole and of the separate numbers contained in it.

### THE FIRST ORATORIO

The first work which combined all these elements was written by Cavalieri, one of the Florentine group already mentioned. Cavalieri was born at Rome and worked at Rome, but he was associated with the group at Florence for several years. Quoting from W. S. Rockstro: "While Peri and Caccini were cautiously feeling their way towards a new style of dramatic music in Florence, Emilio del Cavalieri, a composer of no mean reputation, was endeavoring with equal earnestness to attain the same end in Rome. With this purpose in view he set to music a sacred drama, written for him by Laura Guidiccioni, and entitled, 'La Rappresentazione dell'Anima e del Corpo.' The piece was an allegorical one, complicated in structure, and of considerable pretensions; and the music was written throughout in the then newly-invented 'stilo rappresentativo' of which Emilio del Cavalieri claimed to be the originator. The question of priority of invention is surrounded, in this case, with so many difficulties, that we cannot interrupt the course of our narrative for the purpose of discussing it. Suffice it to say that, by a singular coincidence, the year 1600 witnessed the first performance, in Rome, of

Emilio's 'Rappresentazione' and, in Florence, of Peri's 'Euridice'--- the earliest examples of the true oratorio and the true opera ever presented to the public. The oratorio was presented at the Oratory<sup>of</sup> S. Maria in Vallicella in the month of February, ten months before the appearance of 'Euridice' at Florence. Emilio del Cavallieri was then no longer living, but he had left such full directions, in his preface, as to the manner in which the work was to be performed, that no difficulty whatever lay in the way of bringing it out in exact accordance with his original intention, which included scenes, decorations, action, and even dancing on a regular stage (in Palco). The principal characters were Il Tempo (Time), La Vita (Life), Il Mondo (the World), Il Piacere (Pleasure), L'Intelletto (the Intellect), L'Anima (the Soul), Il Corpo (the Body), two Youths who recited the Prologue, and a Chorus. The orchestra consisted of one lira doppia, one clavicembalo, one chitarrone, and two flauti, 'o vero due tibie all' antica.' No part is written for a violin; but a note states that a good effect may be produced by playing one in unison with the soprano voices throughout. The orchestra was entirely hidden from view, but it was recommended that the various characters should carry musical instruments in their hands, and pretend to accompany their voices, and to play ritornelli interposed between the melodies allotted to them." \* Directions for the presentation

\* Article on Oratorio, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

of the drama are quoted by Burney\* from Cavalieri's preface as follows:

"It is recommended to place the instruments of accompaniment behind the scenes. (These instruments were, in Cavalieri's work, a double lyre, a harpsichord, a large guitar, and two flutes.)

"(1) The words should be printed, with the verses correctly arranged, the scenes numbered, and the characters of interlocutors specified.

"(2) Instead of the Overture or Symphony to modern musical drama, a madrigal is recommended, as a full piece, with all the voice parts doubled, and a greater number of instruments.

"(3) When the curtain rises, two youths, who recite the prologue, appear on the stage; and when they have done, Time, one of the characters in the Morality, comes on, and has the note with which he is to begin given him by the instrumental performers behind the scenes.

"(4) The Chorus are to have a place allotted to them on the stage, part sitting and part standing, in sight of the principal characters; and, when they sing, they are to rise and be in motion, with proper gestures.

"(5) Pleasure, another imaginary character, with two companions, are to have instruments in their hands, on which they are to play while they sing and perform the ritornels.

"(6) Il Corpo, the Body, when these words are

\*Burney, "History of Music."

uttered, 'Si che hormia alma mia,' etc., may throw away some of his ornaments, as his gold collar, feather from his hat, etc.

"(7) The World, and Human Life in particular, are to be gaily and richly dressed; and, when they are divested of their trappings, to appear very poor and wretched, and at length dead carcasses.

"(8) The Symphonies and Ritornels may be played by a great number of instruments; and, if a violin should play the principal part, it would have a good effect.

"(9) The performance may be finished with or without a dance. If without, the last chorus is to be doubled in all its parts, vocal and instrumental; but, if a dance is preferred, a verse beginning thus: 'Chiostri altissimi, e stellati,' is to be sung, accompanied sedately and reverentially by the dance. These shall succeed other grave steps and figures of the solemn kind. During the ritornels, the four principal dancers are to form a ballet, 'saltato con capriole,' enlivened with capers or entrechats, without singing, and thus, after each stanza, always varying the steps of the dance; and the four principal dancers may sometimes use the galiard, sometimes the canary, and sometimes the courante step, which will do very well in the ritornels.

"(10) The stanzas of the ballet are to be sung and played by all the performers within and without."

It should be noted that this early work began with a prelude, in this case a madrigal with full instru-



mental accompaniment, the voice parts being doubled by the instruments. This later developed into the overture. Here also appeared, no doubt for the first time, a printed libretto for the audience. Again, there is a long bridge from Cavalieri to Wagner, in that it was recommended that the accompanying instruments should be hidden. In the theatre at Bayreuth the orchestra is concealed from the audience. It will be noticed that the characters and chorus were to act their parts, putting in "proper gestures." Another interesting and unexpected part of the performance is the dance. This is to be done in a sedate and reverential manner by the chorus, while the principal characters vary their steps into the more lively galiard and courante. The chorus is also to sing during the dance. Below is an extract from a recitative and air sung by the "Intellect," and one from a chorus.

*Intelletto*

ogni cor ama il be-ne nessun vuol star in pena; quindi mille desiri, etc

*Coro.*

questa vita mor-ta-le per fu-gir pre-to ha l'ale.

Cavalieri died in 1600 or 1602 --- the date is uncertain --- and for some twenty-five years no one took up the work he started. Toward 1625 musicians in Italy and in Germany became interested in the <sup>sacred</sup> music drama. The Italian composers of oratorio of the seventeenth century are more important for the influence they had on the development of oratorio in Germany and England than for the works which they produced. Oratorio was born in Italy and passed its youth there, but the highest types of oratorio are distinctly German and English, coming later from the hands of Bach, Handel, Mendelssohn and Elgar. But it is desirable to investigate briefly the further work of the Italians in order to appreciate the German and English forms.

Of perhaps the most importance was the perfection of recitative by Carissimi (1604-1674), Stradella (1645-1691), and Alessandro Scarlatti (1659-1725). Although a great deal had been done toward the evolution of the monodic style, yet before the time of Carissimi it was very poor music. Carissimi sensed the mistakes of the earlier composers and wrote music having dignity and beauty, and yet retaining all the dramatic element which they would have desired. He was a trained musician and combined in his writing dramatic expression and correct technique. The latter element was lacking in the earlier monodic music. Carissimi's works became examples of artistic excellence. Of greatest interest here are his oratorios and sacred cantatas. It may be said at this



A change in the method of presenting the oratorio, which Carissimi quickly adopted, came about toward the middle of the century. Action began to be discarded in the churches. The dramatic character of the text was retained through the use of a person called "Historicus," whose duty corresponded to that of the "Narrator," which came later. To him were given narrative passages which, in the absence of scenic action, were necessary to the intelligent carrying on of the story. This practice, as has been noted, was not uncommon in the plays of the middle ages. Here again was a step toward the modern form, for the Narrator is a common character in the oratorio of as late a date as the end of the nineteenth century.

Less is known of Stradella than of Carissimi and Scarlatti, but the examples of his work which are preserved are of great beauty and refinement. A story is told of Stradella which, though interesting, has little or no historical value. Assassins, who had been hired to kill him, arriving at the church where he was presenting his "Saint John the Baptist," were so touched by the music that they confessed to Stradella the plot and asked his forgiveness. This performance is thought to have taken place in 1676. The work opens with a symphony of three movements, followed by an air and recitative for St. John. Two orchestras were used, a small orchestra of two violins and cello, and a large one of two violins, viola and bass. Each instrument had an individual part instead of doubling a voice. The following melody is from "St. John:"

Handwritten musical score for two staves. The top staff is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time, with lyrics "Anco in cielo anco in cie-lo il blando Auriga do-po aver re-". The bottom staff is in G minor (two flats) and 3/4 time, with lyrics "ca-to il gioi-no si rag-gi-ra d'og-ni in-to-r-no, etc.". The music features various note values, rests, and phrasing slurs.

A most important contribution was made by Alessandro Scarlatti, perhaps the greatest Italian figure of the century. This was the well-balanced "Da Capo" form of the aria, a three part form consisting of a principal strain, a second part which is different, and a repetition of the first part. Musicians of both Italy and Germany, recognizing its advantage, quickly adopted the form, and it has been generally used since. While a musician of the new school, Scarlatti recognized the value of contrapuntal technique and obtained a mastery of it, which gave to his works a polish and grace not found in those of his predecessors. Naumann in his "History of Music", says: "As a composer Scarlatti was greatest in his sacred works. It is these that specially represent the 'Neapolitan style,' a style which for nearly a century retained a high place in the musical world. .... With Scarlatti the severe harsh outline of the forms used by the old canonical contrapuntists was softened by free, graceful melody. It was

greatly to his advantage that he employed the old church style, because in it he had, ready made, a form impregnated with deep religious earnestness. In place of the old strict thematic counterpoint, he substituted a freer development of parts so musically worked out, that the result was the growth of a new and vigorous church style, which rapidly gained adherents amongst musicians, and soon won also the favor of the people." The influence of Scarlatti on other composers is suggested by the following quotation from Mr. Ernest Walker in Grove's Dictionary: "Mr. Dent quotes from the Assumption and Christmas oratorios some singularly delicate and fascinating music which gives rise to strong wishes that the complete works might be readily accessible: the air in which the hymns of the angels and shepherds in the stable at Bethlehem are depicted is particularly interesting as showing a close likeness, which can hardly be altogether accidental, to the 'Pastoral Symphony' in Handel's 'Messiah.' "

From the beginning of the eighteenth century Italy has added little to the field of oratorio. There oratorio and opera were treated in practically the same way. The tools were made there, so to speak, the technique and the form developed, and a part of the material provided, but the highest development was to be made in other lands, in Germany and in England, where oratorio was lifted from the level of opera and placed upon a new plane of feeling and sincerity foreign to the Italian works. In the northern countries oratorio became a part of the religious life of

the people; in Italy it was entertainment.

Two branches of oratorio grew out of the work of the great Italians of the end of the sixteenth century, the Italian branch, which has just been discussed, and which is found to have withered within a century and a half, and the other the German branch, which has grown into one of the highest forms of art. Connection between the early Italian form and the German form was made by one man, Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), who studied from 1609 to 1612 with Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice. Here he acquired the Italian technique to which he added the German seriousness and solidity. His method of treatment was widely different from that of the Italians. He had in mind only the solemnity of the text. There was no suggestion of the stage and very little tune. Some of his passions had no accompaniment and contained quite a little of the plain song. However, in his "Resurrection" a narrator is accompanied by four gambas, and the other soloists are accompanied by the organ.

Following Schütz was Johann Sebastiani, who wrote, the in 1672, a setting of a Passion in which he employed a number of chorales and wrote original music for the narrator.

But the course of German sacred music was to be largely determined by the practice in the Protestant church of congregational singing, instituted by Luther. In order to interest and unify the congregations Luther had provided in the vernacular a large number of hymns for the congregation to sing. These took the form known as the chorale.

Many of them were folk-song tunes, others were new. This was a part of the teachings of the Reformer that there should be only one mediator, Jesus Christ, between man and God, and that man should worship his God by having an active part in the services of the church. This congregational singing became a universal practice in Germany and exerted a powerful influence over the life of the community. The chorale became a part of the daily life. Structurally, it was strongly harmonic, and this harmonic style gradually worked itself into the choir music, although it never completely took the place of counterpoint. Indeed, the German composers became more skilled in counterpoint than the contemporary Italians.

One other composer, Reinhard Keiser (1673-1739), assisted in bridging the gap between the Italian oratorio and the crowning works of Bach. His works are much more in the German style than those of Schütz, but he did not realize the possibilities of the chorale. Some of his works are of the highest order, equal to some of the best work of Bach, and without doubt having a great influence on Bach.

The discussion thus far has been of conditions and developments leading up to the appearance of those really great examples of oratorio. Before Bach's time there had been written a great number of works which are called oratorio, and many of them contain fine passages, but they are very small in comparison to the works of the masters which are to be next discussed. Yet there should be no attempt at comparison. They are, indeed, the foundation upon which the



great works were built. Without them the "St. Matthew Passion," the "Messiah," the "Elijah" and the "Dream of Gerontius" would have been impossible.

The early influences may be summarized as follows: the mediaeval plays, employing music in parts; the revival of interest in Greek drama and the resultant monodic style of singing; the renewal by Neri of the practice of giving sacred plays in the church; the perfection of form, not only of the cantata or oratorio as a whole, but also of the separate numbers of which it is made up, the arias and choruses; and the injection into it all of the German deep religious sentiment. The discussion from this point will be centered on four composers whose works in the field of oratorio are without equal,---John Sebastian Bach, George Frederic Handel, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Edward Elgar. Each wrote full grown oratorios, each in his own particular style which can be called a type, each different from the other. The fact that the first three mentioned are called classicists does not signify that they resemble each other in style further than to have observed in general the rules as to the form of the oratorio. A somewhat detailed examination of the most prominent work of each will show the development, or the trend of oratorio. The works to be thus examined are the "St. Matthew Passion," of Bach, the "Messiah," of Handel, the "Elijah," of Mendelssohn, and the "Dream of Gerontius," (which marks the most advanced step in oratorio) by Elgar. Other works of these same composers would no doubt serve as well, and in a history of oratorio

a large number of other composers would necessarily have to be mentioned, but since the primary purpose here is to indicate the trend, or the development of the modern tendency in oratorio, these works as types present sufficient material.

### THE CLASSICISTS.

Since three of the great writers of oratorio have been referred to as "classicists," it should be pointed out here just what is meant by the term. "Classic" has two connotations, (1) the popular idea of something of unusual excellence which has stood the test of time, and (2) the more definite idea of a work written in a particular period and conforming to certain rules of form, symmetry, finish and content. The latter is the meaning used when speaking of classical music. In the course of the development of the art, as has been mentioned, certain well-balanced forms came to be considered artistic and convenient, and later, essential. The forms employed by composers who were looked upon as authority, came to be generally adopted as standard. Hence there grew up rules for the forms of musical compositions, and adherence to these rules in writing was of paramount importance. In the case of writing for voices, the words and melodies had to fit into particular forms or patterns. Mention has already been made of the invention by Alessandro Scarlatti of the da capo form of the aria and its popularity

even to the present time. This form may be taken here as an example. The modern writer may employ this form in general, but does not feel bound by it; he uses it only so far as it fits his purpose. But in the seventeenth century, to write a da capo aria was to write it in three parts, the first and third parts being alike and in the same key. Modulation to the dominant was made at the cadence in the middle, and a return to the tonic at the end; the second part was of different tempo or rhythm, and usually in the sub-dominant. Brief modulations could be made at the cadences provided they were made gradually to a closely related key. Under these restrictions one aria was like another in form, the only difference being in content, and even this was restricted. It was not considered good taste to display a great deal of feeling or emotion, and as a result the dramatic element was lacking. There was little opportunity for individual expression in the strict form. But no composer adhered strictly to these rules and for this reason every composer of note who had ideas was considered a modernist in his day. Bach was one of the most formal of the classicists, but as will be seen later he sometimes deviates from the set form and frequently inserts dramatic and descriptive passages. This is more true of Handel and still more so of Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn wrote in the "Romantic" period, but was little affected by the new movement. In general he follows the rules of form and in this respect he differs from the modern Elgar who is not restricted to any prescribed form but allows the form to be determined by the sense and content of the work. In short, the

ideal of the classicist was symmetry of form even at the expense of the meaning. The ideal of the modernist is exactness of expression at the expense of symmetry. The classicist had to make his text fit the form; the modernist cares little about the form but strives to make his music fit the text.

#### BACH: THE ST. MATTHEW PASSION

Passion music reached its greatest development in the "St. Matthew Passion" of J. S. Bach (1685-1750). The sufferings and death of Christ had been a favorite theme in the mediaeval plays and with musicians for centuries before Bach. Since Bach's time composers have, as a rule, looked to other incidents of the bible or to sacred texts from other sources for their efforts in oratorio. Bach made five settings of the "Passion," but only three are preserved. The "St. Matthew Passion" is, with the possible exception of the Mass in B minor, his greatest choral work. His shorter cantatas number about three hundred.

Bach was, above all, an organist, and to properly appreciate his choral works it is necessary to know something of his instrumental style. The organ had taken the place of the choir in the Protestant church in Germany about 1600, and consequently was very closely connected to the congregational singing. It was the practice of the organist of Bach's time to improvise freely in accompanying the hymns, these improvisations frequently being in the form of fugues and elaborate preludes and interludes. It is only natural then that this form should be common in the

writings of Bach. He standardized the form of the fugue. Before his time there was no regularity in the treatment of the parts. "The essence of the completed fugue consists in the answer to the subject at the interval of the fifth and a systematic succession of repetitions of subject and counter-subject, the regular introduction of related keys, in fact a logically organized sectional plan based on subject, answer and counter-subject, all revolving around the pivotal points of tonic and dominant and relative majors and minors. In the development of the fugue the devices on which contrapuntal variety depends may be employed --- augmentations, diminutions, inversions, retrogradations, strettii --- with interrupting episodes either entirely free or based on motives taken from subject or counter-subject. The fundamental scheme of modern form is found in the fugue as well as in the sonata, viz., the exposition in a certain key, modulations through related keys, and the return to the principal tonality. The modern fugue, therefore, is the moulding of the indefinite mediaeval contrapuntal forms into an organized scheme of design under the shaping force of the later tonal system and the idea of thematic departure and return." \*

Bach's choral works correspond closely in structure with his organ works. The movement of the voices is essentially melodic and harmonies are of secondary importance. A good melodic movement was to be preferred to a strong

\*Dickinson, "The Study of the History of Music."

harmonic progression. His style in his choral works is instrumental rather than vocal. This is especially noticeable in the solo parts, where, generally, the voice is only one part of a contrapuntal scheme. If the accompaniment is by orchestra, the voice is of no more importance than one of the instruments. Bach is considered hard to sing, and it is because his melodies are chromatic rather than diatonic, and that he writes intervals which are awkward for the voice but which could be played without difficulty on an instrument.

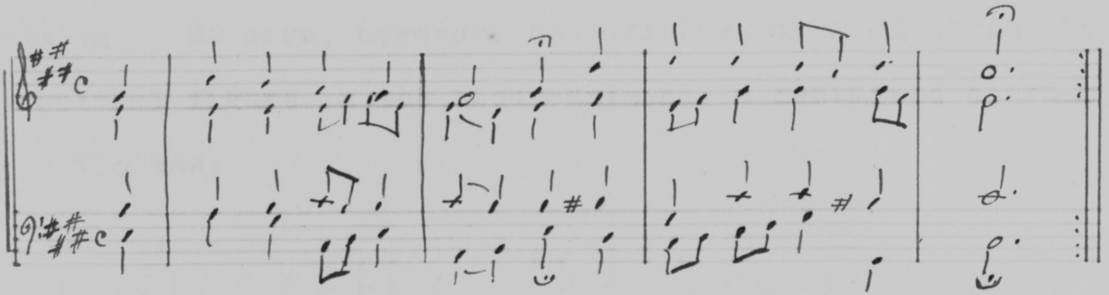
A prominent feature in the structure of his oratorios and cantatas is the frequent use of the chorale or people's hymn. When the works were performed in Bach's time it was the custom for the congregation to sing these in their proper place in the work at the signal from the director. This was a significant part of the performance, because chorales were selected which served as comments upon the story as it was unfolded. These were sometimes questions, sometimes expressions of love or sorrow, made by the congregation who represented in the performance the mass of people generally. Many of his choruses are based on chorales.

The "St. Matthew Passion" is in two parts. The text was prepared by Christian Friedrich Henrici, who wrote under the name of "Picander." Part of the text is from the gospel according to St. Matthew, and part (the hymns) by the librettist. The work is for double chorus, double orchestra and organ. In the St. Thomas church where Bach had it per-

formed for the first time, a chorus and orchestra were placed on each side of the church, and in the opening chorus a third chorus of boys, who were stationed in the dome, were added, singing a chorale tune to the words "O Thou begotten Son of God." Bach's chorus and orchestras were small, consisting probably of about eight singers and eight or nine players. The instruments used were strings, oboes and flutes. The feeling throughout the Passion is one of sorrow; there are no happy songs of praise. Spitta in his biography has this to say of the melodies in the work:

"The grades of feeling traversed by Bach in the solo songs of the 'St. Matthew Passion' are all the more impressive because every sentiment of joy in its various shades is wholly excluded; they are all based on the emotion of sorrow. The most fervent sympathy with the sufferings of the Son of Man, rising to the utmost anguish, childlike trustfulness, manly earnestness, and tenderly longing devotion to the Redeemer; repentance for the personal sins that his suffering must atone for, and passionate entreaties for mercy; an absorbed contemplation of the example offered by the sufferings of Jesus, and solemn vows pronounced over his dead body never to forsake or forget him,--- these are the themes that Bach had to treat. And he has solved the difficult problem as if it were child's play, with an inexhaustible wealth of resource which was most at his command precisely when he had to depict the sadder emotions."

The importance of the congregation in the Passion is shown by the fact that it sings twelve chorales. Observe that the so called "Passion chorale" is used five times to different words and with different part writing each time:

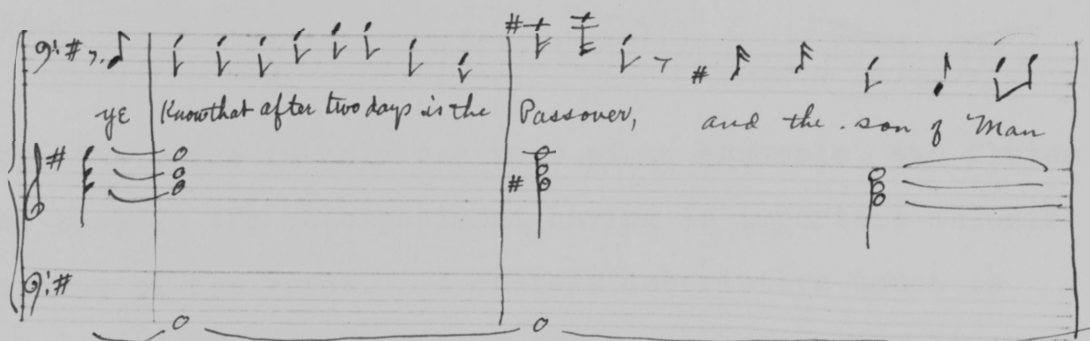


Part I begins with a double chorus, "Come Ye Daughters." The first chorus from one side of the church sings "Come ye daughters and weep with me, Behold Him," to which the second chorus from across the church interposes the question, "Whom?" The reply by the first chorus is, "The Bridegroom, see Him." The question comes, "How?" to which the answer is, "Like a Lamb." After this is repeated twice, a chorus of boy sopranos, who were stationed in the dome of the St. Thomas church during the first performance, add a simple chorale tune to the words, "O Thou begotten son of God." The ejaculations and answers continue, the second chorus gradually taking up more of the work until toward the close it joins with the first chorus.

This is followed by a recitative by the evangelist, a tenor, who is the narrator, announcing the words of Jesus, which are sung by a bass. It is interesting to note that



the words of Jesus are sung by a single voice. In the years preceding Bach it had been considered irreverent to represent Christ by one person, the custom being to have his words sung by three or more voices, usually a soprano, alto and bass or tenor. The idea was to give a sort of indefinite personality to the words. But Bach does not follow the custom. He does, however, set off the words of Christ by a special figure in the accompaniment, a sustained chord by the violins:



Here is what may be called the first instance of the use of a "leading motive," later employed so extensively by Wagner in his operas and by Elgar in "The Dream of Gerontius."

Christ sings the words, "The Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified," whereupon the congregation sings the chorale, asking the question, "O blessed Jesus, what is Thy transgression that Thou must suffer?" The part played by the congregation is similar to that of the chorus in the ancient Greek tragedy, although it is unlikely that Bach knew anything about Greek.

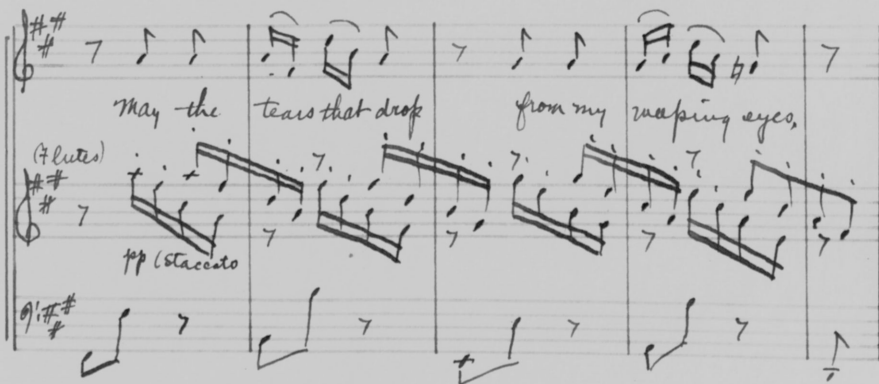
Then follows a brilliant descriptive double chorus which suggests, as it is intended, an uproar among the people.

The apostles are represented as asking, "To what purpose is this waste?" after the pouring on of the ointment by the woman.

The alto air, "Grief for Sin," illustrates Bach's contrapuntal treatment of the voice.



Here the voice is only one part of an ensemble, two flutes and bass in the accompaniment having as important melodies as that of the voice. A curious descriptive touch is added when the flutes play falling staccato notes at the words, "May the tears drop from my weeping eyes," which Wagner might have used later.



Following the bargaining of Judas is an air by a soprano, representing the allegorical character, "Bleeding Heart." The beginning of the chorus, "Where wilt Thou," is very much like the opening of Mozart's "Magic Flute."

In the recitative, "He said, go into the city," note the motive in the violins when the words of Christ are sung. After the chorus asks, "Lord, is it I?" in a very dramatic way, the congregation answers with the words, "My sin it was."

The Daughter of Jerusalem, another allegorical character, sings the recitative, "Although mine eyes," accompanied by a bass and two oboes in thirds and sixths to give a touch of sadness. In the following recitative there is a vivid tone picture at the words of Christ, "The sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."

*vivace*

I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered a-broad etc.

*vivace sciolto*

Note here again the use of the Christ motive at the beginning of the extract.

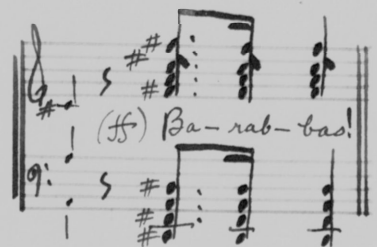
"O Grief, now pants His agonizing heart" is an elaborated chorale for the chorus, with interludes for the narrator. In the bass air, "The Savior falleth low," there is a descriptive touch in the falling chords in the accompaniment.



In the chorale, "O Man, thy heavy sin lament," there is a fine example of the greatly elaborated hymn tune with florid accompaniment. It is a refined and scholarly piece of work.

Part II opens with a solo for contralto, "Alas, now is the Savior gone." The voice holds an F on the word, "Alas," for four measures while the accompaniment plays the figures which appear in the introduction. Bach was fond of having the alto voice hold long notes against a figured accompaniment. There are especially dramatic passages in the duet of the false witnesses and the two short choruses, "He guilty is of death," and "O tell us, Thou Christ." The congregation now asks, "O Lord, who dares to smite Thee?" The incident of Peter presented an opportunity for real imitation, and a modern composer would probably have introduced the crowing of the cock, but Bach did not carry his imitation so far as that. He rather sought to establish a mood or give a setting instead of attempting exact imitation of things outside the realm of music. The alto air, "Have mercy upon me, o Lord," is accompanied by solo cello, and violin obbligato. Bach generally used one of the wind instruments for an obbligato part.

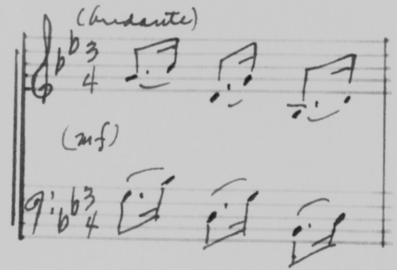
There are three diminished seventh chords in E minor to the word "Barabbas," which the chorus shouts in reply to Pilate's question



as to which of the two men should be released. But immediately following, the chorus, "Let Him be crucified," is

contrapuntal. The use of these chords was very bold at the time, even though they were used for the special purpose of depicting the mob.

In the air, "Be my weeping and my wailing," note the suggestion of sobbing in the rhythm of the introduction.



The accompaniment of the bass air, "Come blessed cross," contains a running solo part by the viol da gamba, an obsolete member of the violin family, in size between the violoncello and the viola. The chorale, "If I should e'er forsake Thee," is the last appearance of the Passion chorale, and ends in the old Phrygian mode. The following recitative for tenor contains another dramatic touch. Note in the accompaniment the tearing runs and the tremolos in the bass, suggesting the rending of the veil and the earthquake.

And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain

from the top unto the bottom, and the earth did



The bass air, "Twas in the cool of eventide," is one of the loveliest numbers in the work and written very gratefully for the voice. The Passion ends with a peaceful, compact chorus for both choirs and orchestras. It is an impressive close for such a work.

No attempt has been made at a detailed analysis of this great work, but rather at pointing out some of the characteristics of Bach's style as expressed here. In a few words they are: lyricism, although at many points there are intense dramatic touches; subordination of the voice part to the level of the instrument, writing for the voice as if it were only one instrument in an ensemble; chromatic nature of the melodies; contrapuntal style almost entirely in the choruses; use of the chorale to be sung by the congregation as well as the elaborated chorale for the chorus; writing the words of Christ for solo voice and the use of a motive to set these words apart.

#### HANDEL: THE MESSIAH.

Interest in oratorio now turns from the continent to England and centers in one man, George Frederic Handel (1685-1759), who has had more influence upon the development of this art form than any other. Handel was born in Saxony in the same year as Bach, but his training in the main was totally different from that of Bach. He was an organist, and with the exception of Bach, the most skilled contrapuntist of his time. His early training

was had in Germany, but becoming interested in opera he went to Italy in 1707 for three years study. Here he acquired what Bach did not have, a facility for writing gratefully for the voice. He mastered the Italian style of opera and oratorio. In 1711 we went to London where he resided to the end of his life, becoming a naturalized British subject. For about twenty-eight years he devoted his efforts to writing and producing Italian opera, at first with great success, but later, on account of jealousies and political strife he lost all his savings and had to turn his attention to something besides opera. It is fortunate for oratorio that this was necessary, for after several unsuccessful attempts to revive his opera interests his efforts became centered on the writing and production of those masterpieces for which he is famous. His operas are never heard, and seldom heard of today, but his "Messiah" is without an equal, and his "Saul," "Israel in Egypt," and "Judas Maccabaeus" have no superiors. Conditions were right in England for the reception and appreciation of these works and he was equal to the occasion.

"The Handelian English oratorio is something 'sui generis'; it had no sort of precursor, and apart from some slight relics in the works of Beethoven and Spohr and some rather clearer ones in those of Mendelssohn, it has left no traces in the work of any great man. Kinship with the previous religious music of Handel's own countrymen is practically undiscoverable; it is far closer to the models of the Italians.....and yet they are sharply differentiated



from the Italian oratorios by the enormous stress which they lay on choral utterance, not by any means exclusively as representing the sentiments of actors in the story but equally or even more frequently as representing the reflections of the religiously-minded listener." \*

"The study of Handel's oratorios involves the examination of the oratorio as an art form. The oratorio is classed in the order of dramatic music, of which it may be said to form a species. It is an error to include the oratorio in church music.....It is concert music.... It is also differentiated from the opera by the predominance of the lyric and epic elements.....The large space given to musical movements whose texts serve as commentaries upon the imagined action helps to distinguish the oratorio from the opera. Particularly is this the case in the chorus, which sometimes expressed the mood of actual supposed participants (Israelites and Philistines, as in "Samson"), while again it utters the reflections of imaginary observers ("Behold the Lamb of God" in the "Messiah"), or it may take the part of a narrator of events (choruses in the first part of "Israel in Egypt").....The more universal character of the oratorio's impression and the frequent prominence of the didactic element give especial opportunity for the chorus. The choral force chiefly supplies the place of action and scenery; it sets forth the ground mood from which the moods of the single characters are drawn, and sustains the emotional keynote, the local complexion and the

\*Ernest Walker, art. on Oratorio, Grove's Dictionary.

ethical purpose of the work. Handel grasped the peculiar prerogatives of the oratorio with a sure hand, and although his power was variable he never failed properly to discriminate between the respective domains of the oratorio and the opera, and he established the ideal and the boundaries of the former once for all. In studying his recitatives and his arias it must be remembered that the style of vocalism in his day was prescribed by the Italian opera in whose habit Handel had grown up, and that his airs were written for singers who had been trained in the opera." \*

It is curious to note that oratorio, the form of music most popular in England, and which has influenced the efforts of nearly every English composer for almost two hundred years, was inaugurated by a naturalized foreigner. Only recently is English music emerging from under the dominance of Handel.

In an examination of the "Messiah," characteristics to be noted are, first of all, the extreme vocal style, the diatonic nature of the melodies generally, the dramatic quality throughout, the importance given to the chorus and the harmonic style of choral writing appearing frequently. The "Halleluia" chorus, his greatest, is written almost entirely on a harmonic basis rather than contrapuntal. In this respect many of the choruses of Handel will be seen to differ from those of Bach.

The "Messiah" opens with a complete three part overture of the French type. The overture serves a very

\*Dickinson, "The Study of the History of Music."

definite purpose of establishing a mood, to give the impression of darkness, despair, dissatisfaction, desolation. To the despairing people comes a word of cheer in the recitative, "Comfort Ye." The instruments which have been impatient and restless throughout the second part of the overture become calm and carry a definite melody through the accompaniment of this recitative by the tenor. The accompaniment is harmonic. The recitative contains an unusual amount of melody. At the beginning of the following air, "Every Valley Shall Be Exalted," it will be noticed

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is for the recitative "Comfort Ye." and the bottom staff is for the air "Every Valley." Both staves are in G major (two sharps) and common time (C). The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. The "Comfort Ye." staff ends with the word "etc." and the "Every Valley" staff ends with "tr" and "etc.".

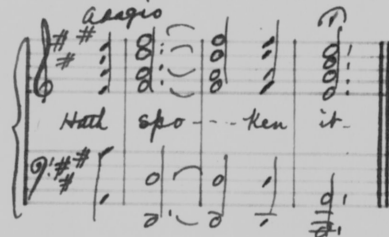
that the melody appears in the accompaniment as an introduction before the voice enters. This is quite common with Handel as will be observed later. This is quite a florid air for tenor, very vocal in style. There are suggestions of limitation in both voice and accompaniment at the words, "the crooked straight and the rough places plain."

The image shows a short snippet of handwritten musical notation. It consists of two staves, both in G major (two sharps). The top staff has the words "the crook - ed" and "straight," written below it. The notation includes notes and rests, with the word "straight," appearing at the end of the phrase.

The theme of the first chorus, "And the glory of the Lord," is heard in the introduction. This is a contrapuntal chorus, beginning with a melody for the altos.

Nawadays it sounds weak in comparison with the entries of the other parts because it <sup>is</sup> written low, but in Handel's time male altos were used in the chorus and this melody lay in the strongest part of their range.

Observe the adagio ending. This is a conventional ending which Handel uses quite often.



In the next recitative there is not the usual statement of the theme in the introduction, but instead a group of chords. A dramatic touch is added in the florid runs on the word "shake", and in the agitated figures in the accompaniment. In the introduction to the following air, "But who may abide," the melody appears as usual.

This is a four part air, of the form A,B,A,B. The first and third parts are pastoral in nature, the second and fourth dramatic, the shimmering figures in the accompaniment suggesting the leaping of the flames.

The next chorus, "And He shall purify," is contrapuntal, suggestive of a fugue at the beginning. Bits of harmony are found between the contrapuntal movements, and it ends in simple harmony.

The prophecy is told and is followed by a beautiful air for the alto, "O Thou that tellest good tidings to Zion," preceded by a long introduction. The air leads into a chorus which ends in simple harmony.

In the air for the bass, "The people that walked in darkness," the blackness of sin and the groping of the people is suggested by the slow turning figures in accompaniment and voice part. Many of the unusual progressions suggest modern harmony.



One of the great choruses follows, "For unto us a child is born." The sopranos begin, imitated by the other voices. Strong climaxes are reached on the words "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, etc.," which are treated harmonically.

A short pastoral movement follows for the orchestra, which sets the scene, so to speak, for what is to follow. It suggests the shepherds and their flocks, even before the soprano <sup>recitative</sup> announces them. In the soprano recitative, the ethereal light and beating of wings are suggested by the shimmering figures in the accompaniment. The heavenly host

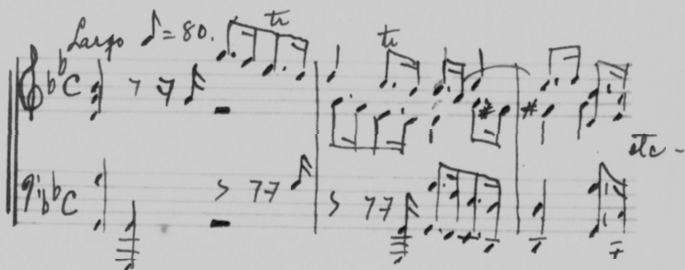
appears singing, "Glory to God." Note the contrast between the high notes of the soprano, alto and tenor on the words, "Glory to God," and the low notes of the tenor and bass on the words, "And peace on earth." Note also the imitative stretto on the words, "Good will," each "Good will" being sung out as if it were the trumpet tone of an angel. All join to sing "peace on earth." The voices reach a climax by rising progressions to an original ending.

"Rejoice greatly" has the Handel earmarks. The melody is played through in the accompaniment before the voice begins, there is the contrast between the voice and the accompaniment, and frequent trills. "He shall feed His flock" is in the pastoral style, for alto and soprano.

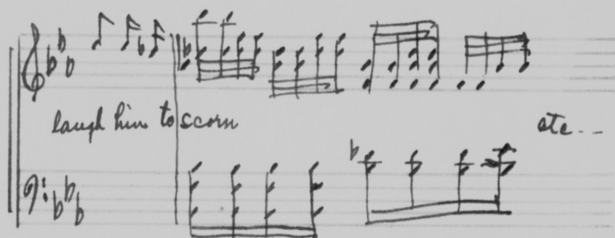
"His yoke is easy" is a contrapuntal chorus but not a pure fugue. It has the conventional ending. This chorus ends part I, which has been concerned with the prophecy and birth of Christ. Part II takes up his sufferings and death in the first part, and a missionary theme toward the end.

"Behold the Lamb of God" has a suggestion of pastoral rhythm, but very slow, suggesting the staggering of a man under a heavy burden, the man in this case being Christ and the burden the sin of the world.

It establishes a mood for the following air for alto, "He was despised," one of Handel's finest. Note the dissonances on the word, "grief." These seventh chords are very mild to



the modern ear, but in Handel's time were harsh. "Surely He hath borne our griefs" is almost entirely harmonic with much of the dramatic element. The next chorus, "And with His stripes we are healed," is an example of perfect fugue writing. This shows Handel to be a master of counterpoint as well as harmony. The next chorus is both harmonic and contrapuntal with a dramatic touch suggestive of aimless wanderings. In the recitative, "All they that see Him shall laugh Him to scorn," note the imitation of laughter in the accompaniment. In the following chorus, "He trusted in God that He would deliver Him," is seen another fugue with the conventional ending.



Following this is one of the most dramatic numbers of the work, the recitative, "Thy Rebuke," and air, "Behold and see." It is an example of almost perfect fitting of music to words.

In the chorus, "Lift up your heads," there is a strong contrast between the women's voices, suggesting a celestial choir, and the men, who suggest voices from the earth. All unite in a contrapuntal chorus which has the customary ending. Note the stretto in the middle part.

The missionary section begins with the next chorus, "The Lord gave the word." The next two numbers are not of particular interest here. But the air for bass, "Why do the nations so furiously rage together," is another of the fine numbers, with the notes very closely fitted to



the text. Rage and agitation are expressed by a lively figure in the accompaniment and by a rhythmic crescendo.

Handwritten musical score for voice and piano accompaniment. The first system shows a voice part with lyrics "why do the na-tions rage" and a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic figure. The second system shows a voice part with lyrics "so furiously to-gether, so furiously to-gether" and a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic figure. The score is written in G major and 4/4 time.

In the next chorus, "Let us break their bonds asunder," are found parts in imitation of a fugue and a stretto. "Thou shalt break them" is dramatic and somewhat descriptive.

The last number in the second part is the "Halleluiah" chorus, the best known and greatest of all oratorio choruses. The first and third parts are on a harmonic basis, with a fugue between. At the end is the usual adagio.

Part III has a spiritual significance, beginning with a simple expression of faith by the soprano in "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The following chorus, "Since



by man came death," begins with a short repeated phrase for quartet in which is found a bit of modern harmony, diminished seventh, and French and Italian sixth chords. In the air for bass, "The trumpet shall sound," Handel employs a bit of pure imitation by writing parts for trumpets.

The "Worthy is the Lamb" chorus has been described as being "carved out of solid rock." It begins in diatonic style with a Phrygian cadence. It is developed somewhat like a fugue with a fine stretto toward the middle. The conventional ending appears at the close. The "Amen" chorus which follows is generally considered a separate chorus, although written as a part of the preceding chorus. It is one of the finest examples of choral fugues. An unusual feature in the instrumental interlude between the statement of the theme and the development. This also has the customary ending.

Oratorio reached its highest development in the "Messiah," which has been the favorite of musicians and public for almost two centuries. Handel's other works are fine, but most of them contain a considerable amount of mediocre material. But there is hardly a number of the "Messiah" which is not of the highest order, and many numbers are beyond compare. In this short examination several characteristics have stood out, and these should be kept in mind while examining the "Elijah" and the "Dream of Gerontius" in order to make an intelligent

comparison and note the points of change. These characteristics may be briefly summarized as: the extreme vocal style, the harmonic treatment of many of the numbers, the close fitting of music to words, the importance of the chorus, frequent stretto, the appearance of the melody in the accompaniment before the voice takes it up, the adagio endings of several of the choruses, the dramatic element. Handel took the oratorio a long step further than Bach. His counterpoint is as nearly perfect as that of Bach and in addition he has a command of harmony that Bach does not have. Handel combined the art of the contrapuntist and that of the harmonist and added the Italian ease of writing for the voice and his own feeling for the dramatic. And yet, with all this dramatic power, Handel's oratorio does not smack of the stage. As has been suggested already, it is pure concert music.

The course of oratorio after Handel to the time of Mendelssohn is best discussed by Parry: \*

"The oratorio had almost collapsed after the time of Handel and Bach, for the universal domination of Italian operatic style affected it more vitally than any other branch of art. The growth of the singularly perverted taste for having church music in the same style as opera, with set arias for "prima donnas" at what might be expected to be extremely solemn moments, and the emptiest and baldest commonplace harmonization in place of the old polyphonic choral music, affected oratorio almost fatally. For though oratorio was not necessarily a part of any ecclesias-

\*Parry, "Evolution of the Art of Music", ch.13.

tical function, its associations were of a religious order, and the style was closely assimilated to that of the various works written for church use. But it could not afford to be as empty as either church music or opera, for it stands mainly on its own footing; and if the music is not interesting in itself, there is neither scenic effect, nor action, nor glamor of an ancient ceremonial to help it out. Other conditions told in the same direction; for it is probable that people did not use performances of oratorios quite so much as operas for fashionable gatherings and gossip; and if the music was tiresome they were bound to become aware of it. Hence the formality of the arias which were introduced, and the graceful<sup>futility</sup> of the Italian style in general, had its full effect, and oratorios fell completely into the background.....

"It was not until operatic art had had the benefit of Gluck's reforms and Mozart's improvements, and the arts of orchestration had been substantially founded upon definitely modern lines, that a revival became possible. Quite at the end of the eighteenth century the appearance of Haydn's "Creation" serves as a sort of landmark of the new departure. It is full of obvious traces of operatic influence, in the forms of the movements and the style. But the sincere peasant-nature of the great composer gave even a special flavor to the florid and conventional airs, which distinguishes them from the ordinary types, and gives them a characteristic ring which the world was not slow to recognize.....The impulse to cultivate oratorio took

special hold of Protestant countries, and those which were the homes of the higher orders of instrumental music --- such as the symphony and various forms of chamber music; and the first important crisis in the modern story of oratorio is undoubtedly centered in the work of Mendelssohn in that department. He was one of the earliest of modern musicians to become intimate with J. S. Bach's work, and to a certain extent, to understand it. His insight was keen enough to see the wonderful interest of the Passion-music type, and the possibility of adapting it to modern conditions; while Bach's intensely earnest style served him as an inspiring example. His critical feeling was subtle enough to hit the true standard of style, just poised half-way between the strict clearness and reserve of instrumental music and the loose texture of the dramatic style; and his scheme proved so generally successful that it has served most composers as a model ever since the appearance of "Elijah" and "St. Paul." The works are so well known that it is hardly necessary to point out the degree in which they make for expression rather than for mere technical effect. To many people they have long formed the ideal of what such expression ought to be. Mendelssohn undoubtedly emphasized melody, but by no means to the exclusion of other means of expression. He was one of the few composers to whom, in his best moments, all the resources of art were equally available. His choral writing was on the whole the most practical and most fluent that has been seen since Handel and Bach, and for mastery of orchestral effect, he had no real superior in

his time. His harmony is full of variety and sufficiently forcible; and his facility in melody quite unlimited. He applied his resources almost to the highest degree of which he was capable in this line of art, and it naturally followed that his solution of the problem of oratorio has satisfied the constant and exacting scrutiny of most musicians ever since."

#### MENDELSSOHN: THE ELIJAH

The plan of Mendelssohn's two oratorios, "St. Paul" and "Elijah," is similar to that of Handel's <sup>Messiah</sup>, but he was strongly influenced by Bach, in whose works he was deeply interested. In 1829 he conducted a performance of Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" at the Singakademie in Berlin, the first performance of the work since Bach laid it away in 1740. This influence of Bach is immediately seen in the use of the chorale, especially in "St. Paul." And in one instance Mendelssohn went back to a custom earlier than Bach's time of giving the words of Christ to a quartet or trio instead of to a solo voice. In "St. Paul" the words of the risen Christ are sung by a quartet of women's voices to give them more of a celestial setting.

In the "Elijah," the idea which was uppermost in Mendelssohn's mind was the dramatic element. In this he went far beyond Handel, making of his work almost a sacred drama which could be presented with action and scenery. However, in the presentations of the "Elijah" there is no

suggestion of the theatre. His idea as regards the dramatic element is clearly shown in letters to Schubring who assisted in preparing the text. An <sup>from one of these letters</sup> extract<sup>^</sup> is quoted from the preface to a Novello score of "Elijah," by F. G. Edwards:

"With regard to the dramatic element, there still seems to be a diversity of opinion between us. With a subject like 'Elijah' it appears to me that the dramatic element should predominate, as it should in all old testament subjects, Moses, perhaps, excepted. The personages should act and speak as if they were living beings --- for Heaven's sake let them not be a musical picture, but a real world, such as you find in every chapter of the old testament; and the contemplative and pathetic element, which you desire, ought to be entirely conveyed to our understanding by the words and the mood of the acting personages."

Mendelssohn gives to his chorus a more intimate connection with the story than either Bach or Handel. They are not mere witnesses or commentators on the action depicted, but are a real part of the action. In the first chorus, the "Help Lord" comes from a suffering people, and in the Baal scene those who are crying, "Baal, we cry to Thee," are the priests of Baal and not spectators.

In the beginning of "Elijah" is found something new, a prologue, the prophecy by Elijah of the drought. This is followed by the overture which establishes the mood of despair which follows the three years drought. The first movement suggests the gradual awakening of the people to the sense of the calamity. As the anguish of the sufferers increases the fugue becomes louder and faster.

Toward the end the theme inverted is taken by the trombones. There is a moment of suspense at the end when the violins play runs ~~of thirds~~ in thirds over a sustained bass, which lead directly into the first chorus, a cry of despair, "Help, Lord." Here is a developed fugue <sup>with</sup> ~~and~~ counter-subject and accompanying figures. The despair and exhaustion of the people is forcefully depicted in the diminuendo at the end. Following this is another innovation, a short recitative for the chorus.

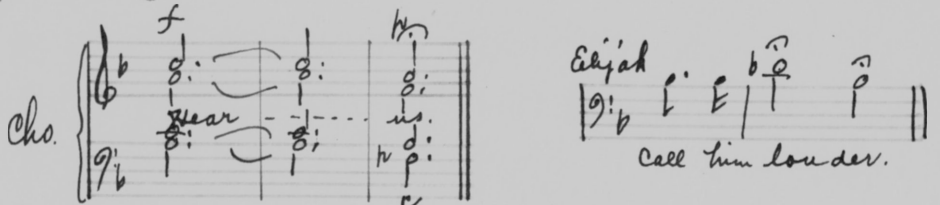
A duet, "Lord, bow Thine ear to our prayer," for two sopranos, follows, accompanied by an old Hebrew chant sung by the chorus. Following this is a beautiful recitative and air for tenor, "If with all your hearts," exhorting the people to repentance.

"Yet doth the Lord see it not" begins in an indignant mood for full chorus in imitative style. Toward the middle a chorale ~~in~~ minor is taken up which changes to major as the indignation passes and a realization comes to the people of the blessings which the Lord sends to those who love him.

Following is the flight to the wilderness and a model of eight-part writing for double quartet in "He shall give His angels charge over thee." The duet between Elijah and the widow is somewhat weaker than the preceding numbers, especially the part for the widow. Mendelssohn had never experienced suffering and sorrow, and his attempts at portraying them are a little superficial and lightly sentimental. The part for Elijah is stronger. The light and delicate

style given to the widow is not in keeping with the sorrow she expresses over the loss of her son. The bringing together of the voices at the end was an unusual thing at the time.

After the three years Elijah goes back to meet Ahab. There is an imitative prelude to the chorus, suggesting the gathering of Ahab's hosts, then a dramatic dialogue between Elijah, Ahab and the chorus. Elijah charges Ahab of being the cause of the Lord's wrath. He then calls Israel to Mt. Carmel to witness a test between the heathen gods and Jehovah, to determine who is the true God. An altar is prepared and the heathen priests call upon Baal to send fire to consume the offering. Here are perhaps the most dramatic parts of the work, presenting a vivid picture to the listener. As has been noted before the chorus here is not looking on the proceedings but is a part of them. It is real. Elijah, Ahab and these priests are characters in a drama. Elijah mocks the priests of Baal, telling them to call louder. There is a striking bit of mockery in the final cadence of Elijah's recitative which imitates the final cadence of the Baal chorus just preceding:

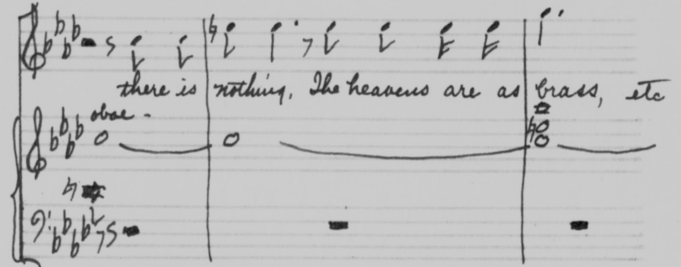


The priests call to Baal again and again Elijah mocks them. They interrupt him with a frenzied chorus of great power and vigor. Elijah then drops his mocking manner and becomes



serious, following with "Lord God of Abraham." This is not so strong a number as its position in the work would justify, but it is nevertheless very fine. In the "The fire descends from Heaven" chorus, the people acknowledge that Jehovah is God in a chorale at the end.

In the rain scene, number 19, there is a dramatic touch worthy of notice. Elijah sends the youth to look for a cloud. The oboe holds the note C alone for two measures, suggesting the clear brazen sky, <sup>while</sup> ~~and~~ the youth reports that there is no cloud in sight.



This is repeated. The third time the youth sees a little cloud and the accompaniment begins a little figure in triplets. As the cloud grows and the winds roar the accompaniment increases in volume and motion, suggesting a storm. The chorus breaks in powerfully with "Thanks be to God." Note the minor seconds as dissonances, the growing climaxes and the thrill at the end when the violins plunge down the scale and hit the bottom as the chorus ends.

Part II is more reflective, dealing with spiritual instead of political problems. In this respect it is similar to Part III of the "Messiah." "Hear ye, Israel" is used in the same manner as "I know that my Redeemer liveth" in the "Messiah," and it is quite likely that Mendelssohn is indebted to Handel for the idea.

"Be not afraid" opens in solid harmony and then

becomes polyphonic. In the middle is a pure fugue in faster tempo. It ends like a chorale.

"Woe to him" shows a revulsion of feeling on the part of the people, worked up by Ahab and Jezebel. Elijah is blamed for the drought and is deemed worthy of death. But he is warned by Obadiah and departs again for the wilderness. Four bars by the orchestra depict Elijah's weary journey.

Following this is a great number for Elijah, "It is enough," expressing his utter discouragement and his desire to die because the people have gone back into their old ways of sin and idolatry. In the second part the tempo is doubled with the theme of the first part in the bass and

Handwritten musical score for the piece "It is enough". The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 9/8. The score is divided into two parts. Part 1 is marked "Adagio" with a tempo of 66. The voice part has the lyrics "It is enough, O- etc." written under the notes. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. Part 2 is marked "Poco" with a tempo of 92. The voice part continues with the same melody. The piano accompaniment features a more active bass line.

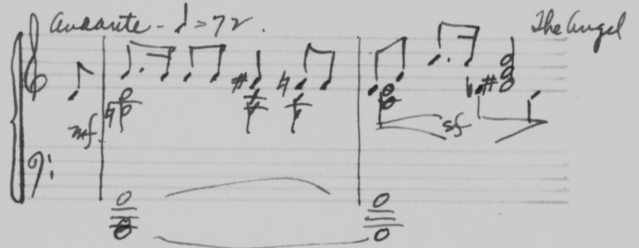
a new theme for the voice. The first theme is again taken up by the voice in the third part, making it a da capo form. This air expresses about as deep feeling as Mendelssohn was capable of. It is a scholarly piece of work but cannot be said to portray more than temporary discouragement. It cannot be called tragic. Following this are three short numbers to encourage Elijah.

The first theme of "It is enough" appears again in the accompaniment

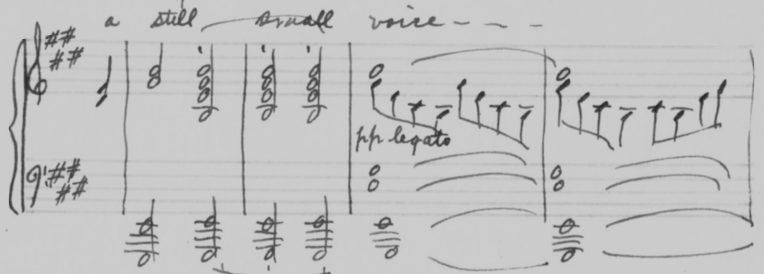
of Elijah's part of the recitative, "Arise, Elijah." This

Handwritten musical score for the piece "Arise, Elijah". The score is written for piano. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 9/8. The score consists of two staves. The tempo is marked "Poco" with a tempo of 92. The score features a prominent bass line with a repeating rhythmic pattern. The right hand has a more melodic line.

was a step in the direction which opera was to take under Wagner. A three-part arioso for alto follows for the purpose of contrast. "He that shall endure" is a chorale in contrapuntal style. At the beginning of the recitative for soprano in the next number, the drought motive of the first chorus appears in the accompaniment.



The next chorus, "Behold, God the Lord passeth by," is the central chorus. These words gave Mendelssohn his idea for the work. Many diminished and dominant seventh chords are employed in the exciting passages. When the still, small voice is mentioned, the accompaniment becomes calm with soft arpeggios in the violins over sustained chords. It is somewhat weak harmonically but is very dramatic and effective.



One of the strongest choruses is "Then did Elijah." There is strong imitation at the appearance of the fiery chariot and horses:



"Then shall the righteous shine forth" is a lovely three-part air but presents nothing new. "O come every one that thirsteth" is another unusual number in that it is written for solo quartet.

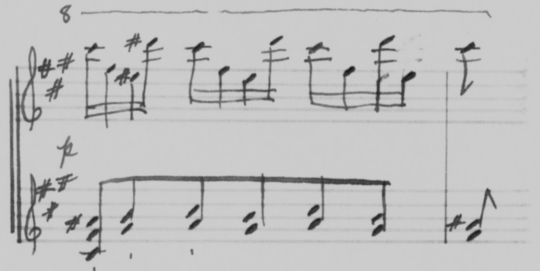
The final chorus, "And then shall your light break forth," is effective. It has a solid harmonic beginning, becoming an imitative fugue. It ends with a seven-fold amen.

Mendelssohn is seen to rely more on the dramatic element than Handel. He carries the characters of Elijah, Obadiah and Ahab through as distinct from each other. Otherwise his work is on the plan of the "Messiah" with the addition of the chorales. His harmony is of course more modern than that of Handel, and his orchestra much larger. But he does not reach the depths of expression as does Handel. Like Handel, he has been a dominating influence on English music, and English composers generally have been content to imitate the style of these two masters. There have been a great number of good oratorios written in the last three-quarters of a century, but no composer of this form, with the single exception of Edward Elgar, has attempted to mark out any new path.

## ELGAR: THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

It is unfortunate that England, the "home of oratorio," has relied so completely upon foreigners for her music, but such has been the case from the time of Handel to the beginning of the twentieth century. There are several English composers at the present time who are showing some originality, the most prominent of them being Edward Elgar, who is of especial interest here for having produced an oratorio which may be classed great along side of the three already examined. His "Dream of Gerontius" is not only good music but presents a departure in type, a new treatment in several respects. Elgar was no doubt greatly influenced in the form of "The Dream of Gerontius" by the Wagner music-dramas, for he has cast the work in nearly the same mold, employing leading motives throughout and adopting a continuous music style. He is not so exact in his labelling as Wagner, a point in his favor, for it must be admitted that, great as Wagner is, he sometimes wearies the listener by his ever-present explanation of the situation through the leading motive, leaving nothing for his audience to do, once the motives are recognized, but to simply follow. The extent to which Wagner carried his scheme can be shown in a short extract from the third scene of the "Rhinegold," when Loge, the god of cunning, seems to admire and praise the dwarf, Alberich. He speaks the following flattering words which Alberich takes as sincere admiration: "....The mightiest must I call thee, for moon and stars, and the sun in his splendor,---

naught will then their power avail them, they too must be thy slaves." While Loge is speaking, the motive of cunning and treachery is heard three times in the accompaniment, and as he stops, the following is heard in the orchestra:



The solid, staccato chords are the Valhalla motive, which is followed immediately by the motive of cunning, indicating that Alberich has to deal with the power of the gods, that Loge's words are not sincere, and that he is at that moment evolving a plan to outwit Alberich and gain possession of the magic ring, which he proceeds to do. By this method, Wagner explains the situation in detail. There are no set numbers as in the Italian opera, and the music is continuous, that is, the orchestra plays throughout from the beginning to end, without the customary break between numbers as found in other forms.

This is the plan which Elgar follows in "The Dream of Gerontius," making of the work a sacred drama which could be performed in the same manner as a Wagner opera. In this incorporation of the dramatic element he exceeds even Mendelssohn. The music is continuous, there are no set numbers, and the characters are distinct. The choruses represent characters who are taking a real part in the action. Although Elgar follows the plan of the Wagner music drama,

his music is entirely in his own style. There is no suggestion of the Wagner harmonies.

It is interesting to note that the possibility of a sacred music drama of this order was suggested by H. R. Haweis, an English clergyman and amateur musician, in an article published in Harper's Magazine in 1891, in which he says:

"And now does the next great art development, the sacred music drama of the future, seem so far off? Does the reunion of sacred music with stage-acting seem so impossible? Does the final reconciliation of the church and the stage seem so visionary? Is not 'Parsifal' on the very verge of it? Is not 'Parsifal' the long sought link between the oratorio and the stage? Oberammergau has got itself accepted as legitimate drama; 'Parsifal' has got itself accepted as semi-religious opera; but one step more and the bona fide sacred music drama will get itself composed, acted, and accepted as the next great creative development of musical and dramatic art....Imagine for instance the effect of St. Paul in the form of a sacred drama set to music instead of an oratorio. What a revival of interest would announce itself in the Acts of the Apostles! What an opportunity to revive the strange and complex Roman world of the first century! .....Where is the inspired genius who will enter this new realm of art and religion, and celebrate the reconciliation of the church and the world by dramatizing the oratorio and consecrating the stage?"

"The Dream of Gerontius" was written in 1900. It

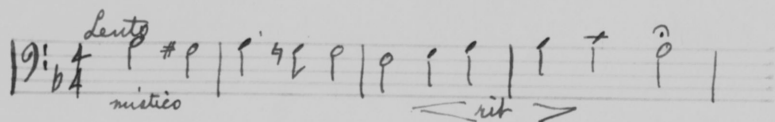


has never been produced as a drama, and it is not likely that Elgar intended that it should be, but its form would allow of such a presentation. The public has not yet seemed to be ready to accept the dramatized oratorio.

The text of "The Dream of Gerontius" is from the great poem of the same title by Cardinal Newman. "The death-bed of a dear friend," says Henry J. Jennings, "was the inspiring cause which occasioned 'The Dream of Gerontius' to be written. Gerontius, while he lies a-dying, dreams of his soul's transportation to the unseen world, and its reception by the ministering agents of the Almighty's will. In a sublime strain of poetic power the mysteries are pictured that lie hidden across the portals of the tomb. The straining eye of a hungering fancy discloses its idea of the soul's 'maybe' of the soul's future." \*

Elgar has scored this work for a very large orchestra of three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, double bassoon, three trumpets, four horns, three trombones, bass tuba, two harps, organ, three tympani, gong, Schellen, Glockenspiel, drums, cymbals and triangle. Sometimes the strings are divided into as many as twenty parts, and the score is one of the fullest in English music. The orchestral prelude is made up of thematic material found in the body of the work, carrying out a definite program. It begins with the Judgment theme ---

No. 1.

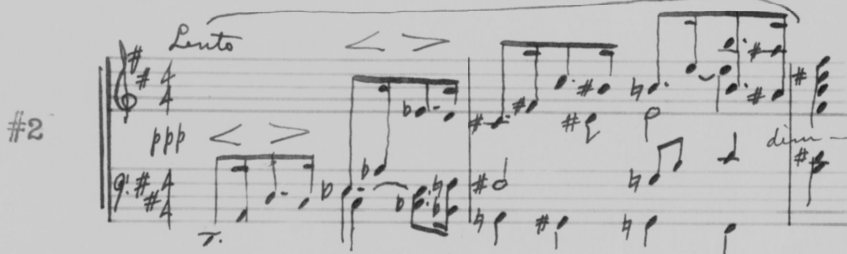


which appears when Gerontius thinks of the judgment handed

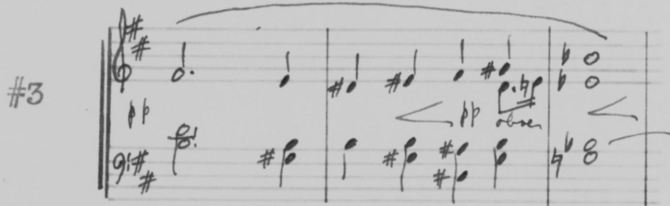
\*Jennings, "Cardinal Newman: the Story of His Life."



out to mortals by God. The application of the themes will be made clear as they appear in the body of the work. The second theme to appear is the Fear theme,



which is followed immediately by the Prayer motive,



These two are then repeated in the same order. The next new theme is the Sleep motive,



representing the troubled sleep of a sick man. This is built up to an outburst of feeling in the Miserere theme, #5, to be followed immediately by the motive of Despair, #6.



## Despair

#6

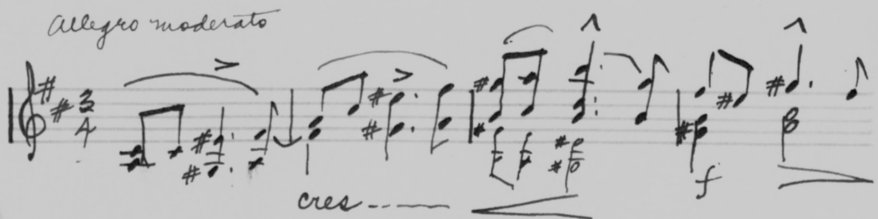


After a modulatory passage the Prayer motive, augmented is taken by the full orchestra. The Despair theme appears again, accompanied by a regular movement by violas and bassoons, suggesting the ticking of Time's pendulum. Then appears the Committal theme,

#7



which is sung by the friends of Gerontius when he breathes his last. The remainder of the prelude is a repetition of the Sleep, Fear, Miserere, Judgment and Energy motives.

Energy  
#8

The Death motive appears just before the voice enters in a semi-recitative:

Death #9

#10

Quasi recit  
espress.

Christ motive  
largamente

Voice & Organ:  
Je-su Ma-ria I am near to death and thou, thou art calling me

The last bar quoted here should be noted, for it is a motive in itself, the Christ melody, and occurs many times later in the work. This motive is repeated in the accompaniment in the next measure:

#11

And thou, thou art calling me

colla parte  
pp espress.

#12

Lento

(Jesu, have mercy! Mary, pray for me)

Prayer motive

Note the Prayer theme (#3) several times at the words in parentheses, "Jesu, have mercy! Mary pray for me." (#12) The appearance of the Energy theme here suggests that he raises himself up to call for mercy. At the close of the recitative, the Death motive is heard, followed by the Sleep motive, suggesting the approach of death and his sinking back on his couch.

A semi-chorus sings a "Kyrie Eleison" for him and

a chorus takes up a fugal movement with the words, "Holy Mary, pray for him." The Energy theme is again heard and Gerontius rouses himself to continue his prayers. Then follows a fine chorus, "Be merciful, be gracious," which is developed in a somewhat orchestral style, the melody gliding from one voice to another as from one instrument to another. The Christ theme, No. 11, appears frequently in this chorus, both in the voice parts and in the orchestra. The chorus leads into the longest and last solo for Gerontius, a re-statement of his faith. A new theme is introduced in the Sanctus:

#13

mf  
Sanctus  
f  
Sanctus Deus  
de profundis  
o-ro.  
to

The Miserere theme, No. 5, is sung on the words, "Miserere, iudex meus," and a new one introduced, the Parce Mihi:

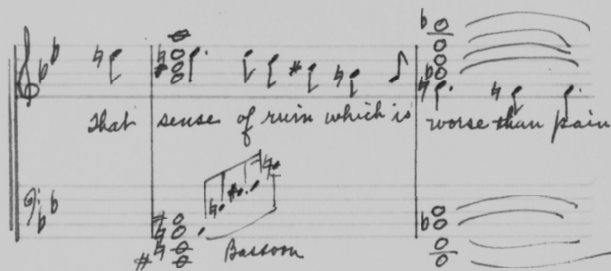
#14

Parce  
mihi  
Domine  
dim

There are references to the Christ theme, No. 11, in several places in the accompaniment. In the interlude the orchestra works up to a climax the Sanctus, Prayer and Despair motives. The interlude ends pianissimo and the voice enters again, soon stating a new motive, the Sense

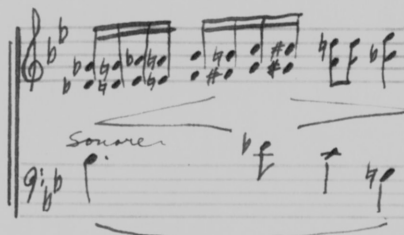
of Ruin (#15). The Energy motive (#8) precedes a delirious outburst in which Gerontius imagines

#15

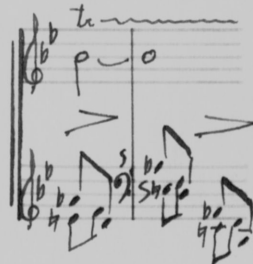


he sees hideous figures. Here is stated the Demon motive (#16) which is developed in the chorus of demons in the second part.

#16



#17



The Fear motive is heard in the accompani-

ment and in a short interlude, the Demoniacal Laugh (#17).

The Despair theme is heard in the agonizing appeal:

*Gerontius:* *Andantino, molto espressivo*

#18

*Andantino*

*Je - su, help*

and a climax is reached on the Christ motive:

#19

*voice:*

*In thine Own a - go - ny*

*cello parte*

The chorus takes up the Kyrie in minor. Following this is something out of the ordinary. A semi-chorus chants to an old Gregorian tune, accompanied by the organ only, "Noe from the Waters, etc.," to which the full chorus, with string accompaniment, sings an "Amen," fully harmonized. After four verses of this, the chorus sings the Kyrie again pianissimo. The last efforts of Gerontius are in the

Hora Novissima (The Last Hour):

#20

*Andante espress. e. quiescente*

and a short recitative, followed by the Sleep motive as an interlude, ending with the Miserere motive in which he commits his soul to God.

The sadness of death is suddenly changed to joy and triumph in the charge of the priest to the soul of

Gerontius to "Go forth upon thy journey." The chorus takes up the theme which soon changes to a nine-part development of

#21

*f*

*Proficiscere anima christiana*

the Committal motive by solo voice, semi chorus and full chorus. The soul is sent upon its journey toward the throne of God.

The second part of the work is devoted to the adventures of the soul upon its flight toward heaven. Newman probably got his idea for this part of the poem from the second part of Goethe's Faust. To this part Elgar had to write a prelude which would provide a setting for the words of the soul which follow, this setting to be silence, space and absence of time. Here is the simple figure which he uses:

#22

*Andantino*  $\text{♩} = 48$

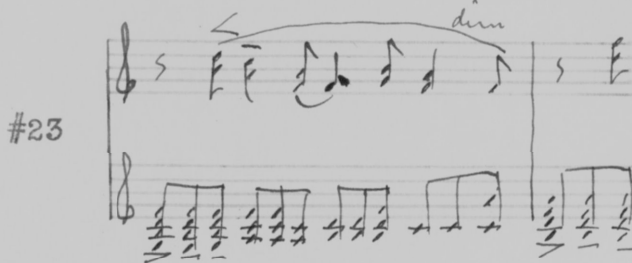
*tempo rubato*

*pp tranquillo*

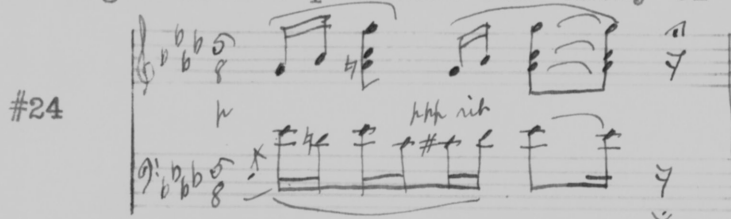
*pp dolce e legato*



Lightness is suggested by accompanying chords in the treble:

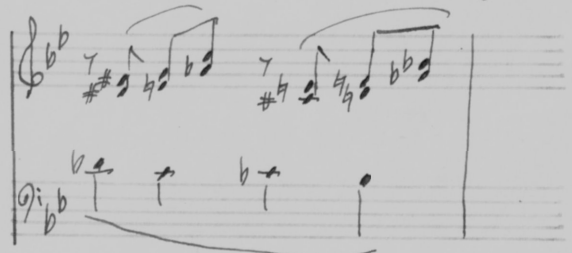


A fine dramatic touch is observed in the recitative in which the soul says he hears music, yet he is unable to determine whether he hears, touches or tastes the tones. The accompaniment is in 5/8 time and the harmonies very indefinite. The Angel motive precedes the entry of the voice.



In the ensuing dialogue between the soul and the angel, the motives of Judgment, Death and Fear appear in the orchestra when the idea is mentioned by the voices. The soul asks why it is that he has no fear of meeting his God now, while during his life on earth he feared death and the judgment. The angel's reply is that it is because he feared while on earth that he does not fear now. They are speeding rapidly toward the throne of God when a hubbub breaks in upon the peaceful

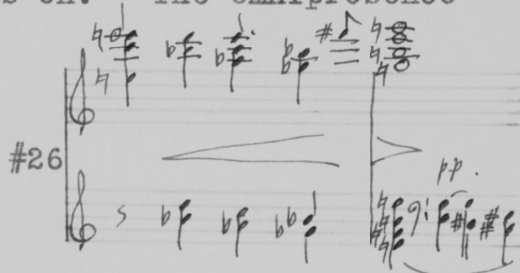
#25



journey. The angel explains that the sudden howl is from the demons who assemble outside the judgment seat to claim for hell the souls who are denied entrance to heaven. As the angel and the soul pass by this region they hear one of the

most powerful and dramatic choruses ever written. The chorus becomes an assembly of devils for the time being and hurl out curses and hellish epithets in a way to make one shudder. The Fear and Demon (#16) motives are developed in the accompaniment. After a few words of explanation by the angel, the chorus continues, this time deriding the holy saints; in this section is found again the Demoniactal Laugh motive (#17).

The soul and the angel pass on. The Omnipresence motive, in whole-tone scale, is heard in the orchestra, indicating the nearness to the throne. In the ensuing dialogue the Energy and Hora Novissima (#20) are heard. When the angel speaks of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, "There was a mortal who is now above in the mid-glory," the Judgment theme appears in the bass, suggesting his reward.



Another chorus is now heard in violent contrast to that of the demons. The Angelicals who surround the throne of God are singing praises to Him. Elgar suggests the celestial nature and perhaps even the flapping of wings with the following figure:

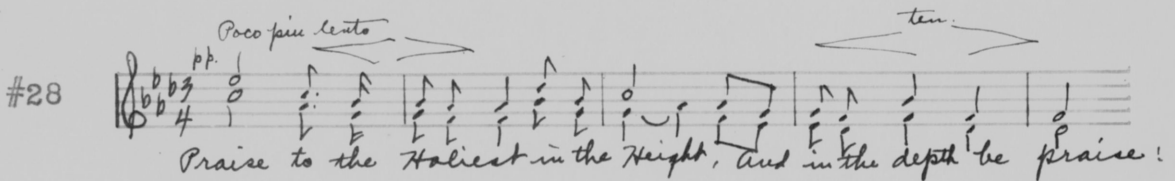


"Commencing pianissimo, the composer supplies a short introduction of five bars before the real entry of the



hymn. But already at the fifth bar of this introduction a remarkable effect of a mighty crescendo and sudden decrescendo on the word, 'Praise,' within one and the same bar, attracts attention. It is as if one of the gates of heaven were opened, and we heard for one full moment the full harmonious hymning of the Angelicals." \*

Following is the melody upon which he builds this chorus:



This is the longest and most pretentious number in the work, built up both contrapuntally and harmonically. It is written for two choruses and a solo voice. After a short interlude, another choir of Angelicals takes up the hymning.

The voices cease singing for a while as the angel and the soul pass on. The Omnipresence motive is heard again. Then the Proficiscere motive (#21) is heard as the soul announces that he hears the voices he left on earth. He is told that it is the echo of the prayers of his friends, coming up to the judgment throne. The Angel of the Agony is heard pleading before God in behalf of the souls which are arriving. The prayers of Gerontius' friends are heard again coming up in a double chorus. He is taken to the judgment

\*Jaeger: "Dream of Gerontius" Book of Words.

seat, while the Judgment motive fully harmonized for full orchestra, is played, building up to a powerful climax on one chord, coming after a short pause:

#29

*Moderato e solenne* *stringendo* *Molto allargando*

*ff pesante* *cres* *con* *do* *fff* *p*

This chord, struck fortissimo and ended piano, is considered to be the moment of fulfillment of the angel's promise to Gerontius: "Yes, for one moment thou shalt see thy Lord." The soul's outcry of joyful anguish is accompanied by the Hora Novissima, the Sanctus, the Miserere, and the Parce Mihi motives in order. This leads into what may be called the finale, a three-part chorus of the souls in Purgatory, a short solo by the angel, and a combining of the full chorus with the choir of Angelicals and the souls in Purgatory, making a final chorus of twelve parts with solo voice. The subject of the Praise chorus is prominent and the Angel motive is heard near the close.

Such a cursory examination of the work shows that its construction is entirely different from all that had been produced before in the field of oratorio. The treatment of the chorus and the harmony in general is thoroughly modern, though not ultra-modern. There is a little of the

whole-tone scale in the Omnipresence motive (#26) used for special effect. The writing for double and triple chorus is especially fine, not being, as is sometimes the case, mere doubling of parts.

The first performance of the work at the Birmingham Festival in 1900 was only a partial success. It was received favorably, but only as a great many other new works are received and then forgotten. But in May, 1902, the attention of the English public was sharply recalled to "The Dream of Gerontius" when, after a performance of it in German at the Niederrheinische Fest, Richard Strauss publicly paid a great tribute to the composer on the excellence of the work. Subsequent performances have been received with great enthusiasm, and it is now looked upon as a landmark in the development of oratorio, --- in fact, as the most advanced step in its development. It is the culmination of all previous forms, showing a technical mastery of all branches of composition, of orchestration, and an unusual flow of melody. Added to all this is the newly developed system of leading motives.

Discussions of art forms usually conclude with prophecies as to their future, but with few exceptions such prophecies are never fulfilled and are only subjects for speculation. What the future will produce no one knows. New forms often take turns so unexpected that

they are rejected as absurd, and their appreciation is a matter of time and education. Two oratorios have recently appeared, written in a style somewhat similar to "The Dream of Gerontius." "The Pilgrim's Progress," by Edgar Stillman Kelly, appeared in 1917. It is in the form of a drama, with characters and complete stage directions. Only slight use is made of the leading motive. "The Apocalypse," by Paolo Gallico, was first produced in 1921. It is of the continuous music type but is not written for dramatic presentation. While it is a work of high merit, it presents no departure in style from what has already been written. It is modern as Wagner and Richard Strauss are modern and the general tone or idiom resembles the works of these two masters. There is a recurrence of motives or characteristic phrases, but these are used primarily to bind together the three parts and prologue rather than as means of aiding the progress of the narrative or of labelling thoughts or emotions.

#### SUMMARY

The beginnings of oratorio are found in the mystery, miracle and morality plays of the middle ages. These plays, originated and sung in the church, continued to employ music in their performance after they were secularized. Song was used in parts of the body of the play and generally by the narrator who related the parts of the story which could not be presented. Instrumental interludes were frequently played between scenes. These plays later came into disfavor with

the church, and as a natural result the form of music employed, the solo parts for voice and the instrumental interludes, were likewise frowned upon as being popular and vulgar. Contrapuntal music for chorus was the only style recognized as legitimate by the church musicians.

Toward 1565 the Florentine priest, Neri, introduced the biblical play into the services which he held for the instruction of the people of the humbler classes. Both spoken and sung forms were used. This accustomed the people again to the drama presented under the auspices of the church. At the same time a form of <sup>declamatory</sup> singing for single voice, termed monodic in contrast to polyphonic, capable of expressing individual feeling and emotion, was being developed by Cavalieri, Peri, Caccini and others under the patronage of the Count Bardi at Florence. The first real oratorio was a sacred drama set to music of the monodic style, written by Cavalieri, and produced in 1600 at Rome. It was intended to be given with action, and Cavalieri left explicit directions for its presentation.

Monodic music was improved by Carissimi (1604-1674), Stradella (1645-1691) and Alessandro Scarlatti (1659-1725). The recitative was perfected and the da capo form of aria <sup>whole</sup> invented. The oratorio as a <sup>whole</sup> began to follow balanced and rounded forms. In Carissimi's time action began to disappear, the oratorio tending toward pure concert music. After being developed so fully technically, the Italian form began to deteriorate toward the end of the seventeenth century, and further and fuller development was made in Germany. Ger-

man composers acquired the Italian technical skill and added to the form a deeply religious spirit, changing oratorio from a means of entertainment to a form of worship. The early large forms were for the most part settings of the Passion, the story of the sufferings and death of Christ. The chorale figured prominently in these works. In these early works adherence to rules governing the form was of primary importance, and everything else had to be subordinated to them. However, no composer observed the rules to the letter.

Passion music reached its greatest development in J. S. Bach, the greatest of the classicists. Characteristics of his style which have been noted are: contrapuntal style of the choruses; frequency of the appearance of the chorale, which was sung by the congregation; instrumental style for the voice and making of it only one part of a contrapuntal scheme; lyricism, with occasional dramatic touches; chromatic melodies. Of great importance for its look into the future is the use, in the "St. Matthew Passion," of the Christ motive in the orchestral accompaniment. This idea of Bach's becomes the basis of modern oratorio.

Handel took a step further than Bach in providing a much stronger dramatic element, in writing a great deal of his choral music in the harmonic style, and in making the chorus of as much or more importance than the soloists. He saw the possibilities of the great modern oratorio chorus and wrote accordingly. Nothing has ever been written for chorus that quite equals the Hallelujah chorus in grandeur of effect and in perfection of vocal style.

Mendelssohn sensed the trend of oratorio and gave the dramatic element more impetus by writing the "Elijah" in such a way that it could, with few changes, be performed with action. The form is similar to that of the "Messiah," but Mendelssohn makes his soloists real characters and gives to the chorus a very intimate connection with the story, using it to represent the people, the priests, or whatever group he desires. He makes some use of the leading motive.

Modern oratorio as exemplified in "The Dream of Gerontius," by Elgar, derives its form largely from the Wagnerian music drama. The prelude is a summary of the material to be found in the body of the work. Motives are used throughout to indicate characters, feelings and emotions, and abstract things. Motives heard in the accompaniment indicate feelings of joy, fear, despair, etc., before a character expresses them. If the hearer is acquainted with these motives he can follow the story very well through them. The music is continuous from beginning to end. Elgar follows the trend of oratorio by adding to the dramatic element, making of his soloists and chorus, as does Mendelssohn, real characters in a drama. He departs entirely from the classical form, having no separate numbers, and following no particular model in his solo parts and choruses. The work is not intended to be performed with action. In this one respect Edgar Stillman Kelly has taken one step further in writing "The Pilgrim's Progress" as a dramatic oratorio, complete with stage directions, which could be performed with costume, scenery and action. The latest work in the field, "The Apocalypse," by

Paolo Gallico, is of the continuous music type and is very dramatic in character but is not intended for performance with action. Whether or not oratorio and opera will join in a form of sacred drama is yet a question for speculation. "Parsifal," Wagner's religious opera, and "The Dream of Gerontius," Elgar's almost-sacred drama, are not far removed from each other.

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